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AUTHOR	Boyer, Carol M.; Ewell, Peter T.
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ABSTRACT

The Education Commission of the States (ECS) together with the American Association for Higher Education recently conducted five case studies of state-based approaches to assessment in undergraduate education in Colorado, Missouri, New Jersey, South Dakota, and Virginia. The case studies, in turn, are part of the Missouri Governor John Ashcroft's college quality initiative as the 1987-88 chairman of ECS. A chronology of critical points for the assessment initiative as it has unfolded in each of the case study states is presented as follows: (1) Colorado (e.g., the May 1986 conference on outcomes assessment sponsored by the University of Colorado); (2) Missouri (e.g., in the summer of 1986, the Council on Public Higher Education engaged the services of an outside consultant to anticipate action on the issue of assessment); (3) New Jersey (e.g., October 1986, the College Outcomes Evaluation Program sponsored its first statewide conference on assessment in New Jersey); (4) South Dakota (e.g., June 1987, following considerable institutional criticism and a change in Board leadership, the Board of Regents approved three major changes in the statewide testing program); and (5) Virginia (e.g., July 1987, institutional assessment plans were reviewed by the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia staff and three outside consultants). (SM)

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STATE-BASED CASE STUDIES OF ASSESSMENT INITIATIVES IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION:

Chronology of Critical Points

PS-88-3

by

Carol M. Boyer and Peter T. Ewell

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Carol M. Boyer is senior policy analyst for higher education, Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO.

Peter T. Ewell is senior associate, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Boulder, CO.

For further information, contact:
Carol M. Boyer
Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, CO 80295
Phone: (303) 830-3625

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ECS recently conducted five case studies of state-based approaches to assessment in undergraduate education; the five states are Colorado, Missouri, New Jersey, South Dakota and Virginia. The case studies, in turn, are part of Missouri Governor John Ashcroft's college quality initiative as 1987-88 chairman of ECS; they were co-sponsored by the American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum, which is funded by the federal Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education.

What follows is a chronology of critical points for the assessment initiative as it has unfolded in each of the case-study states.

COLORADO CASE STUDY -- CHRONOLOGY OF CRITICAL POINTS

Spring 1985 -- The Colorado General Assembly passed House Bill 1187 which contained an accountability provision for public higher education in Colorado. It calls for each Colorado public institution to state its objectives for undergraduate education, and requires that "institutions of higher education be held accountable for demonstrable improvements in student knowledge, capacities, and skills between entrance and graduation." Beginning July 1, 1990, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) is authorized to retain up to 2 percent of the appropriation of any institution that has not implemented, or is failing to implement, any part of the accountability program.

May 1986 -- Conference on outcomes assessment sponsored by the University of Colorado; speakers included legislators sponsoring H.B. 1187, institutional representatives, CCHE representatives, and national experts on assessment.

January 1987 -- "Accountability in Higher Education: Meaning and Methods," a white paper for the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, was prepared by Dennis P. Jones and Peter T. Ewell, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (Boulder, CO). The intent of the paper was to stimulate subsequent discussion of the accountability provisions of H.B. 1187 in regional meetings throughout the state.

Colorado Case Study (Cont'd)

April 1987 -- The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) sponsored a statewide "accountability conference" for institutional representatives and governing board staffs to discuss the white paper and how it might apply to the Colorado situation.

June 1987 -- Following the national conference on assessment sponsored by the American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum in Denver, CCHE sponsored a follow-up meeting with Colorado participants to discuss the content of the AAHE conference, the Colorado accountability statute, and a statement of principles suggested by the participants at the earlier CCHE conference (see April 1987).

October 1987 -- CCHE sponsored a one-day "Legislative Symposium on Higher Education" initiated by Representative Paul Schauer to provide an opportunity for governing boards and members of the legislative education committees to discuss how well the system of higher education has been functioning since the reassignment of authorities carried out by the General Assembly in House Bill 1187. At the symposium, CCHE distributed copies of a brochure, entitled Colorado Higher Education Pursues Excellence -- Report on the Implementation of HB 1187, that highlights progress to date and Commission priorities for the coming year.

December 1987 -- CCHE's "Policy and General Procedures for the Development of Acountability Programs by State Supported Institutions of Higher Education as Required by 23-13-101" (dated 12/9/87) defines the responsibilities of the Commission and the governing boards and their institutions with respect to Colorado's accountability provision. It calls for statements of "institutional goals and objectives for undergraduate education" to be submitted by the governing boards to CCHE for staff comment by June 1, 1988; and for accountability program proposals to be submitted by the governing boards to CCHE for Commission approval by December 1, 1988. The Commission approved this accountability program policy at its February 1988 meeting.

MISSOURI CASE STUDY -- CHRONOLOGY OF CRITICAL POINTS

1985-86 -- Governor John Ashcroft of Missouri served as chairman of the National Governors' Association (NGA) Task Force on College Quality. The charge given his task force was to examine how much students are learning in America's colleges and universities. To answer this charge, the Task Force held hearings in St. Louis, Washington, DC, and Kansas City, and received reports of experts from around the country.

Summer 1986 -- The Council on Public Higher Education (COPHE), which consists of the presidents and chancellors of Missouri's four-year public colleges and universities, engaged the services of an outside consultant to anticipate action on the issue of assessment. The consultant's proposal was considered unworkable and was subsequently rejected.

August 1986 -- NGA released its report, Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education, and included a report from Governor Ashcroft's NGA Task Force on College Quality. The task force made the following recommendation about assessment: "Each college and university should implement systematic programs that use multiple measures to assess undergraduate student learning. The information gained from assessment should be used to evaluate institutional and program quality. Information about institutional and program quality also should be made available to the public."

Fall 1986 -- In an effort to develop a cooperative approach to assessment (independent of CBHE) for Missouri's four-year institutions, COPHE established its own faculty committee on assessment. The committee met for the first time in November 1986 and was instructed to complete its work during the 1986-87 academic year. About the same time, Missouri's two-year institutions agreed to take a similar approach, and the Missouri Association of Community and Junior Colleges (MACJC) appointed a Committee on Quality Assurance to develop a cooperative approach to assessment. The MACJC committee began meeting on a monthly basis in October 1986.

December 1986 -- Governor Ashcroft issued a "challenge" to institutional leaders and trustees during a statewide conference on "Strengthening Undergraduate Education and Assessment,"

sponsored jointly by the Governor's Office and CBHE. In his formal remarks, he announced that he "would like to see systematic programs of student assessment in place within the next academic year on each campus" (i.e., by the fall 1987 term) and that he would recommend for targeted investment funding only those assessment projects that were "practical, 'do-able,' and realistic," not those that "purport to study the assessment issue." He stated that each program should assess the acquisition of knowledge, the development of higher-order abilities such as critical thinking and problem solving, and the improvement of basic skills such as reading, oral and written communication, and computation. He further stated that each assessment program should be appropriate to the mission of each institution, but should not be so institution-specific that "valid references cannot be made to nationally-normed data at comparable institutions and with comparable students." And finally, he stated that the purpose of assessment should be "to improve teaching and learning on each campus," and that institutions should "disclose to the public what kinds of assessments they are conducting and what the results are."

April 1987 -- The COPHE faculty committee on assessment released its final report, including recommendations and plans for implementing assessment in Missouri's public four-year colleges and universities. The MACJC Committee on Quality Assurance released its report, entitled "Quality Assurance in Missouri's Community Colleges," at about the same time.

December 1987 -- CBHE released a report, entitled SHOW ME EXCELLENCE: Assessment in Missouri Public Colleges and Universities, that provides "a description of the status of assessment initiatives in Missouri's public colleges and universities after the first year of statewide effort."

NEW JERSEY CASE STUDY -- CHRONOLOGY OF CRITICAL POINTS

March 1985 -- At a New Jersey Board of Higher Education retreat, Board members "exchanged ideas on the development of a comprehensive program to evaluate the outcomes of higher education." The Board agreed that "the concept of such a program has merit and that the next step should be the presentation of a proposal" for the Board's consideration.

May 1985 -- In a memorandum to the Academic Affairs Committee of the New Jersey Board of Higher Education, Chancellor T. Edward Hollander outlined the "principles, guidelines, and course of action" he believed should be followed in developing such a comprehensive evaluation program.

June 1985 -- The College Outcomes Evaluation Program (COEP) was created by resolution of the New Jersey Board of Higher Education. The Board's intent was (1) to maintain public confidence in higher education, (2) to ensure continued support and funding for higher education, (3) to stimulate curricular improvements, (4) to nurture institutional autonomy and individual diversity, and (5) to stimulate educational excellence. Upon the Chancellor's nomination, the Board appointed a COEP advisory committee composed of students, faculty, administrators, and members of the business community, government, and the nonprofit sector. The advisory committee was asked to "study options and report to the Chancellor its recommendations on how best to design and institute a comprehensive system of evaluating the outcomes of higher education." While considerable emphasis was placed on developing a sophomore test in verbal skills, quantitative reasoning, and critical thinking, the advisory committee was also asked to consider other potential components of assessment, including other areas of student learning and development, faculty research and scholarship, and community/society impact.

September 1985 -- An editorial by Governor Kean, entitled "What States Should Do (and Not Do) to Improve Undergraduate Education," appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education. "The key to excellence in undergraduate education," Governor Kean asserted, "is to find an appropriate balance between state leadership and support on one hand and institutional autonomy on the other."

October 1985 -- The COEP Advisory Committee met for the first time. Given the size of the committee (23) and the complexity of its charge, the advisory committee divided its work into four parts and created a subcommittee for each: student learning; student development/post collegiate activities; research, scholarship, and creative expression; and community/society impact.

October 1985 -- The first recipients of the Governor's Challenge Grant Program to promote excellence in higher education were announced. Under the program, state colleges submitted proposals for using the available funds to improve their institutions. The proposals were considered by an outside review board, which recommended awards to the New Jersey Board of Higher Education. The board accepted the panel's recommendations to award $5.72 million to Jersey City State College and $3.97 million to Kean College; approximately $600,000 of the three-year grant to Kean College was designated for assessment.

October 1986 -- COEP sponsored its first statewide conference on assessment in New Jersey.

January 1987 -- The Board of Higher Education passed a resolution endorsing "the philosophy and principles of postsecondary assessment" as expressed in a position paper written by the Chancellor.

May 1987 -- At the second statewide conference on assessment, Governor Kean began his remarks by saying "It's time for some frank talk among friends -- among people who share a common belief in the importance of higher education. It's time for us to deliver on some promises." Later, he added: "The assessment system that you and the Board of Higher Education are building must satisfy your own highest standards....Go back to the promises you made. Design an assessment that is real, that has integrity, that you believe in."

May 1987 -- The New Jersey Department of Higher Education issued its RFP (Request for Proposal) to obtain the professional services of a contractor to "develop prototype assessment instruments for use in the College Outcomes Evaluation Program," the focus of which would be the assessment of "general intellectual skills." A mandatory bidders conference was held in

late May. The Department eventually accepted a revised proposal submitted by the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey.

October 1987 -- The COEP Advisory Committee presented its final report to the New Jersey Board of Higher Education. Among the components of the recommended comprehensive assessment program were a common statewide assessment of "general intellectual skills" (to be developed for use by each institution) as well as assessment (by each institution or its faculty) of the specific outcomes of its general education program, student learning in the major, student development (using common statewide definitions for indicators such as retention and completion rates, grade point averages, and credit completion ratios), and students' personal development and satisfaction. In addition, the program would require each institution to assess (a) the outcomes of faculty research, scholarship, and creative expression; (b) its success in providing access and meeting the human resource needs of its population; and (c) its particular impacts on the community it serves. The COEP Advisory Committee recommended that the Board create "a standing broad-based COEP Council to continue the development of these efforts, oversee the collection and analysis of the information, and report regularly to the Board of Higher Education."

January 1988 -- The newly created COEP Council met for the first time.

SOUTH DAKOTA CASE STUDY -- CHRONOLOGY OF CRITICAL POINTS

Spring 1984 -- The South Dakota Board of Regents appointed a task force to investigate the use of student test scores as a measure of academic performance.

August 1984 -- Responding to the recommendations of the task force, the South Dakota Board of Regents adopted Resolution No. 32-1984 regarding the "testing of baccalaureate graduates." Beginning in the spring of 1985, this resolution required that: (a) all second-semester sophomores take the ACT Assessment Test; (b) all non-teaching majors take an appropriate exit examination in their major; and (c) all teaching majors take the general knowledge and professional knowledge batteries of the National Teacher Exam (NTE) and an appropriate specialty area test. In addition, beginning in the fall semester of 1985, one half of the incoming freshmen, selected on a random basis, were required to take the ACT-COMP Objective Test. The same students would later be retested as second-semester sophomores with the ACT-COMP objective test or the ACT Assessment Test required for admission; these results would provide a "value-added" measure of the first two years of college.

Test scores would not be used to disqualify a student from graduation, nor would they be made a part of the student's permanent record, although failure to take a test would be indicated on the student's permanent record. The Board recommended that a $5.00-per-semester student fee be used to fund the testing program.

Although the Board adopted the task force recommendations as a resolution, it modified some of the details of the program. The first semester of exit testing (spring 1985) was limited to the National Teacher Exam (NTE), Engineer In Training (EIT), and the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) subject tests for selected majors. The Board also appointed a testing committee composed of representatives from each campus, the Students Federation, and the Regent's office to implement the program. Campuses began implementing the program in 1985.

June 1987 -- Following considerable institutional criticism and a change in Board leadership, the Board of Regents approved three major changes in the statewide testing program. The changes included: (1) shifting the ownership of assessment from the

Regents' office to the individual campuses; (2) shifting the mandatory focus from individual students; and (3) broadening assessment to include a full range of expectations for student performance, departmental analysis of outcome measures, and enhanced curricular viability.

VIRGINIA CASE STUDY -- CHRONOLOGY OF CRITICAL POINTS

1985 -- Through Senate Joint Resolution 125, the General Assembly directed the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) to "investigate means by which student achievement may be measured to assure the citizens of Virginia the continuing high quality of higher education in the Commonwealth."

1986 -- The study, called for in the resolution just described and presented to the General Assembly as Senate Document No. 14, was accepted in Senate Joint Resolution 83. In that resolution, the General Assembly asked all public institutions in Virginia "to establish assessment programs to measure student achievement," with the proviso that "the Council, in cooperation with the state-supported colleges and universities, should establish guidelines for designing good assessment programs and report to the public results of institutional efforts to measure student achievement in its biennial revisions of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education."

January 1987 -- A task force of institutional representatives was formed to work with SCHEV staff to develop guidelines that reflected the recommendations in Senate Document No. 14 and that respected both the complexity of the Virginia system of higher education and the need to ensure consistency across plans.

April 1987 -- SCHEV approved the guidelines and passed them on to the 39 public colleges and universities to help them in formulating their assessment plans, which had to be submitted by June 30.

May 1987 -- The governor issued his "guidance memorandum" to the institutions for development of the 1988-90 budget request; in it, the governor stipulated that institutional eligibility for incentive funding would depend among other things on having submitted an "adequate student assessment plan" by the June 30 deadline.

July 1987 -- Institutional assessment plans were reviewed by SCHEV staff and three outside consultants. Some plans were judged to be adequate and some were accepted with stipulations.

A few plans were vague, underdeveloped, or demonstrated inadequate understanding of the nature of student assessment; they were rewritten.

October 1987 -- SCHEV received and considered proposals from institutions regarding base funding increases in the 1988-90 biennium required to implement assessment. Proposals were funded, involving direct budget allocations of approximately $12/FTE student.

December 1987 -- SCHEV sponsored a two-day statewide "conference on undergraduate student assessment" in Charlottesville, VA. SCHEV also released its draft "Report on Student Assessment," the final version of which will be included in its biennial revision of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education.